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ABSTRACT

Bibliotherapy, a therapy using the reading of literature as well as the act of creative writing, should be considered as a therapeutic technique in its own right, not just as an alternative to other therapies. It may help any age or ability level, including those who are blocked in more self-searching therapy, and it may also contribute to a more general understanding by society of people who have been neglected or misunderstood. The use of literature about people who are deviant by virtue of physical or behavioral problems may be beneficial to parents, teachers, and therapists, while the technique of personalized creative writing can provide special meaning to exceptional people themselves and should be encouraged. (JM)

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BIBLIOTHERAPY FOR PEOPLE IN QUANDARIES

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I. Introduction

Two emphases have been evident as the arts have become legitimized as techniques of psychotherapy. The one, is the use of arts as systematic devices of communication and expression: techniques of education. The other emphasis, perhaps the more usual in the field, is toward development of self actualization, and healing; techniques of therapy.

Naranjo (1971) discusses the relationship of therapy and creative process:

> "As to the relationship between art and therapy as ways of expression and liberation, it may be said that art centers in the issue of expression, and therapy in that of removing blocks to expression, but any sharp boundary between the two processes can only be artificial. The shaman was at the same time an artist and healer, and today we seem to be entering a stage of decompartmentalization of disciplines through which we can understand their original unity. More specifically, art-education disciplines are becoming therapies, and therapy is seen as both an art (rather than a medical technique independent of the inner states of the "patient") and a means of liberating the artist in the "patient" (page 118)."

Whereas the visual arts, the dance, drama, and music have been widely explored as therapeutic techniques, the literary arts of poetry and prose have not received much as attention by psychotherapists,

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and limited attention by educators. This might seem curious, since so much of therapy occurs through verbal exchange. It could be noted, too, that many of the psychiatric concepts have been developed with reference to literature of the culture--the "Oedipus complex" being an obvious example. Many notable therapists such as Freud, Jung, Ross, Riech and Erickson have drawn deeply from Greek, Biblical, folk and national literature to refine and elucidate psychotherapeutic concepts.

In practice it could be speculated that therapists have only turned to the nonverbal expressive arts as alternatives to the verbal therapies when the latter were inappropriate. Young children, people with a performance orientation, or those severely blocked verbally may prefer or need other forms of expression and communication. Actually, non-literary artists have chosen nonverbal media for communication. I recall reading of the social awkward and inept Beethoven at a loss for words with his very ill friend. Subsequently he literally played his heartfelt condolences outside her bedroom door, and was gratefully understood.

It is suggested here that bibliotherapy be considered as a technique in its own right, and not only as an alternative to other therapies. By adjusting choices of literature to age levels and levels of sophistication it can serve the very young, and persons who are not highly academic. It may be an aid also to those who are blocked in more self searching therapy. It may also contribute to a more general understanding by society in general of people who have been neglected or misunderstood.

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This paper is an attempt to explore a few of the possibilities for use of the verbal arts in education and in therapy, particularly, in relation to people with very special problems and very special needs.

II. Definition of Bibliotherapy:

Webster's Third International Dictionary (1968) defines bibliotherapy as follows:

> "The use of selected reading materials as therapeutic adjuvants in medicine and psychiatry: also, guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed readings."

The Dictionary of Education (1959) has a somewhat more general definition:

> "Use of books to influence total development: a process of interaction between the reader and literature which is used for personality assessment, adjustment, growth, clinical and mental hygiene purposes: a concept that ideas inherent in selected reading materials can have a therapeutic effect upon the mental or physical ills of readers."

Neither of these definitions include a very important component which is assumed in definitions of the therapies of dance, drama, music and art; namely, the possibility of creativity in the medium, by the client or patient, rather than simply using the products of the medium, to enhance growth, understanding and/or healing. In this discussion, creative writing would be considered a part of bibliotherapy; and, perhaps, its ultimate development.

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III. Help for People in Quandaries

The thrust of the discussion today has to do with the usefulness of the expressive arts and therapies with persons who are in some way different, or deviant, or abnormal, or exceptional. For clarification they must be distinguished from the "normal" population.

At one extreme we have Goffmann's sardonic contribution:

> "For example, in an important sense, there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young married, white urban, northern heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective, this constituting one sense in which one can speak of a common value system in America (p. 128, 1963)."

Blane suggests the possibility of a more inclusive view of what could be socially acceptable in American society:

> "Our culture's inability to integrate deviants it produces contrasts with other societies where special functions and roles give deviance its place--sometimes an honored one in society and permit the deviant to "belong." (1968, p. 128)."

This paper is restricted to consideration of bibliotherapy in its use concerning people who are deviant by virtue of physical or behavioral problems which preclude normalcy even using a very broad definition of the so-called normal.

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Bibliotherapy can be a particularly powerful and enjoyable vehicle of attitude change. It is an effective avenue of communication for normal people and a strong aid to those who must, as Goffmann, puts it in the subtitle of his book, endure "The Management of a Spoiled Identity (1968)". These are people in quandaries who cannot change their situations or be cured of their condition. What can be envisioned as goals to be achieved are peace of mind, and the sense of belonging and worth that should be the legacy of every human being.

IV. Reports from Professional Literature

Numerous articles detail the use of literature to aid people in some way different or in some way in need of help: Riggs (1968), Thomas (1967), Leedy (1969, 1973), Shultheis (1970), Janyzer and Karl (1971), and Zucaro (1971), Association of Hospitals and Institution Libraries (1971).

In education of young children Strassier stated (1954):

> "While it is recognized that handicapped children might benefit from rich experiences with all good books for children, it is believed that books dealing with children or animals who are handicapped would have especial value for handicapped children. (p. 2200)"

Moody (1974) did a study with 18 handicapped and 17 nonhandicapped pre-schoolers to ascertain preference for picture story books with handicapped or non-handicapped children as their heroes. The nonhandicapped groups enjoyed equally both types of books, whereas, the handicapped children showed a significant preference for books about children like themselves. She agrees with McGuire who reports

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a program of using books showing children and animals that were handicapped:

> "The children come wearing braces, in wheelchairs, or crutches, but their needs and interests differ little from non-handicapped classmates. For both groups, books are helpful in laying foundations for a worthwhile, satisfying adult life (1969, p. 607)."

This writer has found very little clinical evidence concerning the benefits to handicapped people in actually writing down a chronicle, or discussing feelings or phantasies, except, perhaps in the area of primary emotional disturbance. For example, Leedy (1969, 1973) has provided readable and informative descriptions of techniques employing poetry therapy. He uses both published work and the creative endeavors of his clients or patients in the therapy sessions.

V. Use of Bibliotherapy with College Students

Trade literature seems a good alternative or addition to textbook reading in the area of [illegible] education, particularly with undergraduates. College students seem exceptionally interested in the literature of deviancy and this can be used to good advantage systematically in coursework. Le Unes (1974) remarks of graduate students:

> "...there is a discernible thread of consistency that marks their interests in abnormal behavior, and these readings can constitute the beginning of a master thriller list for students at that level (p. 213)."

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It is our experience in special education at the University of Pittsburgh that the books make the rounds of the dormitories and are read with an interest and enthusiasm far surpassing the usual college textbook.

Literature can help the deviant college student also. As an experiment, one quadruplegic cerebral palsied college student was given the novel, "Tell Me That You Love Me, Junie Moon." This is the much popularized story of three marred and mutilated social rejects who finally learn the lessons of love and responsibility together. "It's the best book I ever read," she said happily in her athetold, choked speech. The book was voluntarily read by all in the class. Such a shared experience where the crippled girl's kind of people were the heroes fostered a new closeness and understanding by all the students.

A particular book can be used instructively to help with a special problem. For example, one bright, but inexperienced, special education student was placed for student teaching in a secondary classroom in a rehabilitation agency. After two days, he came in to complain about his classroom of nine, hyperactive, dropout boys with suspected neurological involvement, "Those kids don't show me the proper respect;" he said. He almost wanted to "beat them into being good." A first reaction of mine was to point out that these boys would not be in special education if they were respectful, and that he has chosen a field in which he must give, rather than expect to derive instant benefits. Fortunately, I cut my sermonizing and suggested he read a book fortuitously called, "Nine Rotten, Lousey Kids" (1972, Grossmann), for a class report. Remarking that his class, too,

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had nine lousey kids, he left. His subsequent class report was a lively one, in which he expressed insight as to the difficult lives his "rotten" pupils had had. When asked if the book helped him, he said:

> "Oh yeah, it helped me become aware. I learned about these symptoms--I can go face that kid in my class tomorrow and say, 'I understand your problem'."

It is the writer's recollection that Margaret Meade once wrote that American methology includes the belief that anything is possible: anything can be fixed, all disease is curable. The literature of deviancy can give an instructive pallative to this view. It emphasizes the reality and implacability of exceptionality. It gives credence to Musset's lovely quote:

> "How glorious it is - and also how painful - to be an exception."

VI. Use of Bibliotherapy with Parents

Books about deviant people show the means and possibilities of enduring disabilities, surviving social stigma and even transcending human frailities.

Books written by parents of handicapped children seem to have particular educational and therapeutic value for other afflicted parents. Some of this work has high literary merit - some is very unsophisticated, and can be matched to similar people. It is often more meaningful to other parents, who face quandaries, than advice and sympathy of professionals who are intellectually, but not personally very close to the situation.

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Individuals who are limited in intellectual ability in the cognitive verbal areas understandably do not usually contribute to literature (although there are exceptions even here). However, many parents have written of their experiences with mentally retarded children to give particular understanding of their disability.

Experimental reasearch seems indicated to ascertain the educative and/or therapeutic value of utilization of the literature of deviancy with children and adults; with the normal and the handicapped.

VII. Creative Writing by People Enduring Handicaps

It was suggested that creative expression would be the ultimate development in the expressive therapies as well as the expressive arts, and perhaps the fruition of the union of art and therapy.

Kubie (1960) has explored in great depth the relationship of the artists' neurotism to his creative products, noting as evidence of abnormality the repetitiveness and peculiarity of both themes and archaic symbolism in particular artists' works. It seems an equally legitimate point of view to see the artistic products as culmination of a highly constructive process of dealing with inner and outer conflicts and problems by troubled, talented people.

The published literature of deviancy is often autobiographical and focuses on the feelings, problems and coping of people with extreme disabilities and who face extraordinary problems.

A bibliography of approximately 1000 entries of trade books concerning the handicapped has been compiled. Of these about one half are actually written by handicapped persons, and some by parents

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or spouses of the handicapped (Mullins, 1974). The inference might be made that writing this literature was cathartic, in the Aristotelian, if not Freudian, sense of the word, by the fact that most of the authors are not professional writers.

Condon (1972) provides some insight into the benefit of her own written exploration of her feelings of loneliness and isolation. She is both a psychotherapist and a quadreplegic, dependent since college days on a motorized wheelchair. She writes:

> "Epilogue: I began unsure of what questions would emerge. I end without any answers. Yet I feel content for I have stated my dilemma so that even I see it more clearly."

The meaning of the literary creative process to handicapped individuals might be made more clear by a closer examination of the kinds of individuals who write and the nature of their works:

By far the largest categories of disability represented in the trade literature of deviancy are the sensory disorders; the deaf, the blind, and the deaf-blind (Mullins, 1974). In these categories are people who are deprived of the most important avenues of human communication, aural and/or visual. They are very often socially deprived far beyond the physical restraints of their impairments, by the deep routed fears and prejudices of more normal people toward these particular handicaps.

Adventitiously blind persons, usually of rather extraordinary intelligence and insight, have contributed a large literature describing the shock and mourning accompanying loss of sight, and the gradual rebirth of personality into the new identity of the successfully

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blind person, as well as exploring attitudes of others toward them. These books have blindness as a central theme and might be considered therapeutic work as well as communication and good literature.

It is interesting to note that persons who have been blind from birth seldom contribute to the literature of blindness. These congenitally blind people develop consistent perceptual communication systems and do not experience a loss of that which they have never known. Their particular dilemma is rather concerned with social acceptance and opportunity than on physical deprivation (Peabody, 1974).

Differences among congenitally deaf and deafened authors can also be noted. The adventitiously deafened individual may find written communication his only means of social contact for some time. His desperation can be duly noted in the literature.

Of those persons who are deaf at birth, only a small percentage will ever achieve a facile command of their native spoken or written language. We are familiar with the expertise of deaf individuals in the theatre of the deaf, and in mime. There are a number of deaf individuals who have chosen to write, however, and many of these write in free verse. Free verse allows departure from English syntax, which is extremely difficult for the non-hearing to master, and perhaps allows the deaf person to approximate the very different syntax of sign language. It would seem that this area also would be fertile for further linguistic research.

A few persons, who are both deaf and blind, have made contributions to the literature of deviancy. It myst be cautioned that such people should never be used as examples to comfort parents of handicapped children, or handicapped persons themselves. These

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people are notable exceptions, who can be admired for their genius; but they are incomparable, handicapped or not. The point is made here that their written contributions seem, to this reader, intensely therapeutic.

Helen Keller's literature is voluminous and usually optimistic so that the layman might be surprised at her bitter description of total deafness:

"Ours is not the stillness
that soothes the weary senses;
it is the inhuman silence
which severs and estranges
It is the silence
not to be broken by a word of greeting
or the song of birds
of the sigh of a breeze
It is a silence which isolates
cruelly
and
completely."

Persons with mobility problems often have a constricted life-space and can be dependent on others even in such basic activities of daily living as toileting and eating. Many severely handicapped authors have explored their inner worlds and shown independence of spirit to the common enrichment of all of us. Much of this literature was painfully written in iron lungs, by pen in mouth, or a left toe.

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The unhappiness of the physical cripple is expressed by permanently disabled Battye from his wheelchair:

> "This is perhaps the bitterest truth of all, the one that most of us find the hardest to accept--that we are forever barred from the deepest, most intimate levels of human intercourse (1966)."

Reconciliation with the painful fact of difference is explicated by Ysabel Borel, Swiss worker with the handicapped, stunted by osteogenisus imperfecta:

> "It is not a question of wishing to prove, at all costs, that we are not unadaptable. That would be fruitless and false. It is a question, primarily, of accepting our limitations; of accepting--for many of us--the fact that we shall never be completely adapted to a world of able-bodied people. Once we have accepted the fact, we shall be conquerors and not by wishing to prove, against all logic, that we are like the others. (International Society of Crippled, p. 62.)"

Cerebral palsied Christy Brown in books and poems reflects on the consequences of his affliction. He writes:

> "A child with a crooked mouth and twisted hands can very quickly and easily develop a set of very crooked and twisted attitudes both towards himself and life, in general, especially if he is allowed to grow up without being helped to an understanding of them."

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Siegfried Sasson's poem of gentle irony might move even a well meaning professional toward a certain discomfort:

Does it matter?--losing your legs
For people will always be kind,
And you need not show that you mind
When the others come in after hunting
To gobble their muffins and eggs.

Lastly, various writers tell us the plight of the misfit, the person who feels like the proverbial square peg in the round hole. This may be due to some kind of mis-match between him and his environment, his perceptions and realities, hidden handicaps, or tribal stigma. The dread of the stutter, the lonely existence of the leper, the terror of the psychotic, the shame of the hard of hearing. These experiences, the reconciliation, and even the triumph are richly chronicled by sensitive, sharing people.

Since the published literature suggests that handicapped individuals often do indeed profit from the exercise of written exploration of their feelings and experiences in relation to their marred lived, it could be suggested that this technique might also be of personal value to children and others who might never aspire to publish.

There is a most legitimate effort in special education to emphasize health and normalcy rather than dwell on defects and disabilities. It is also more comfortable for the teacher not to look at unpleasantness. I believe the trend in the therapies is also a reinforcement of health rather than extensive concentration on pathology.

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Nevertheless, persons with extreme life problems need opportunity and encouragement to work them through. Teachers could be encouraged to use creative writing classes for such purposes, and therapists could use written work as they now use other art forms.

VIII. Summary and Conclusion

It was suggested at the beginning of this presentation that normalcy and abnormality are relative. Here we avoided a controversy by only considering use of literature about people whose extreme deviancy would make them appear as "exceptions." The use of this literature for education and therapy has been suggested, without our drawing a firm line to delineate the one from the other. The act of creation and its special meaning to exceptional people themselves was considered.

Perhaps there is some of the unassimilatable in all of us - and particularly those of us who have chosen to treat or teach those on the edges of the normal curve. The point has been made that we are not in the business of obliterating differences, that would be a futile struggle, but rather reckoning with differences.

Highet (1954) artfully emphasizes this point for educators:

> "But after he has learnt the main types and subspecies,
> some unclassified individuals will always remain.
> These are the joys, the sorrows, and the horseflies
> of the teacher's life."

And Greenburg pleads from the patients couch:

> "Doctor, my difference is not my disease."

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In conclusion it is suggested that the technique of personalized creative writing could be beneficial to persons who face difficult life situations and should be encouraged by teachers and therapists.

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